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The notion of text and the notion of document -- What difference does it make?

The origins of the notion of both text and document can be traced back to antiquity. Over the course of their respective histories – which I will not go into at this juncture – the meanings of both terms have evolved. Beyond the commonly used meanings, there are numerous other usages in various fields of specialization.

In the context of literary scholarship – primarily regarding literature published since the second half of the 20th century - the standardizations within the publishing industry have led to analyses and interpretations that are mostly distinct from the medium itself. Due to the rise of the so-called new media and new types of text however – be they in the form of computer games, hypertext fiction, internet archives, or digital manuscripts – a growing number of literature scholars are aware of the fact that materiality must be taken into consideration along with content and that this is valid for both electronic texts and texts in codex format. Nonetheless, we tend to hang on to the expression “text” – whether this is based on tradition or due to a lack of a better word. Only new compounds emerge in technical literature: “hypertext” (Bolter: 1991), “paratext” (Genette: 1989), “technotext” (Hayles: 2002), „cybertext” (Aarseth: 1995) as well as the application of a broad notion of text that views all systems of signs and symbols as text and consist of “alphanumeric characters, spoken language, music, still pictures or moving pictures, to mention only a few examples” (Gunder: 2001, 86). Coming from bibliographic tradition, others attempt to link text and document with one another, establishing a bibliographical unit with terms such as “work text” and “document text” (Dahlström: 2002, 81).

The names and examples given here belong to a wide variety of disciplines, such as literary scholarship (Genette, Gunder, Hayles), Media Studies (Bolter, Aarseth), and Library and Information Sciences (Dahlström, Dalgaard). The boundaries between these tend to be fairly fluid though, since they are all involved with what we refer to as new media. In the cases in

which a distinction is made between document and text, this is made within a hierarchy of document - text - work, as described by David Levy, who wrote:

In this division of responsibilities, a document is a physical artifact bearing meaning – or information-bearing symbols; a work is the essential meaning or idea that is being communicated; and a text is that which mediates between document and work: a sequence of words which, as the expression of a work, can be realized or embodied in one or more documents. These notions thus typically form an abstraction hierarchy: from the fully concrete document to the abstract text to the even more abstract work. (Levy: 2003)

Traced to its etymological roots of “doceo + mentum” by Niels W. Lund, the notion of document has rarely been applied within the Humanities and even been met with some resistance. This may have to do with the fact that it includes social and mental aspects in it as well as material aspects. At once broad and more general, Lund’s notion of document can be interpreted on the one hand as a reaction to the history and development of term and on the other hand as its continued development in the present.¹ The question of the extent to which documents can be described as true or untrue, correct or incorrect is no longer relevant to Lund’s notion of document.

Of particular interest regarding Lund’s notion of document are Aarseth’s “cybertext” term and Hayle’s “technotext” term, as both imbue the material aspects with essential meaning. In order to do justice to the physical form of literary texts, Hayles suggests the term “technotext,” “a term that connects the technology that produces texts to the texts verbal constructions” (Hayles: 2002, 25f.). Hayles asks:

Perhaps it is time to think the unthinkable – to posit a notion of text that is not dematerialized and that does depend on the substrate in which it is instantiated. Rather than stretch the fiction of dematerialization thinner and thinner, why not explore the possibilities of texts that thrive on the entwining of physicality with informational structure? (Hayles: 2003, 275)

Aarseth’s term “cybertext” encompasses the material and social aspects as well as the mental aspects, and thus is in close proximity to Lund’s notion of document.

[...] a text can never be reduced to a stand-alone sequence of words. There will always be context, convention, contamination; socio-historical mediation in one form or another. [...] Instead of defining a text as a “chain of signifiers,” as linguists and semioticians do, I will here use the word for a whole range of different phenomena,

¹ On the various traditions cf. Lund: 2003.

from short poems to complex computer programs and data bases. As the “cyber”-prefix indicates, the text is seen as a machine, not metaphorically but as a mechanical device for the production/consumption of verbal signs. Just as a film is useless without a projector and a screen, so a text must consist of a material medium as well as a collection of words. (Aarseth: 1995, 22ff.)

However, if the majority of literature scholars were to agree with the assertion that the book publication of a novel constitutes the same text as that novel in Braille, as a book-on-tape, as a hypertext, film, or computer game (cf. Hayles: 2003, 266), we must ask which terms lend themselves to indicate the *differences* between these objects.

As long as we engage ourselves with literary texts that consist exclusively of writing, the notion of text may still be appropriate. Social and material aspects of a written document can be described using such terms as “context” and “paratext.” As soon as we come across a text that combines several media such as text and image, or we find a text that is available in various versions and/or media, the notion of text encounters difficulties. I’d like to illustrate this assertion with an example from literature: Christa Wolf: *Cassandra*. Four Lectures. A Narrative (1983). This example, a widely read text by a well-known East German author, is a somewhat random choice. The large quantity of secondary literature on the text is based almost without exception on the “text” *Cassandra*.²

As with most of the texts by Christa Wolf, *Cassandra* appeared almost simultaneously in the East German publishing house Aufbau and in the West German Luchterhand. Over the years, reprints and other editions such as that of the Leipzig publishing house, Reclam, with etchings by Nuria Quevedo. As early as 1984 and 1985, numerous translations of the lectures and the narrative or just the narrative alone appeared. The handwritten manuscript of *Cassandra* and various preparatory works are located in the Academy of the Arts’ Christa Wolf Archive in Berlin. Beyond these various editions of the book, a radio play version by Gerhard Wolf – Christa Wolf’s husband –, an opera, a dance theater piece, and different stage performances emerged.

Furthermore, *Cassandra* has – as do many texts in the literature of the German Democratic Republic – an unusual progenesis. In March 1983, *Cassandra* appeared in the West German publishing house, Luchterhand, in two separate editions: the Frankfurt poetics lectures as

² West German reviewers pointed out that an abbreviated and censored version of *Cassandra* had been published in the GDR. Of course, this was done for political reasons, not for scholarly ones. The stricken passages were published in *FAZ* on February 25, 1984.

“precursors to a narrative” and the narrative *Cassandra*. The one-volume edition by Aufbau in East Berlin was delayed because the Central Publishing Administration of the Ministry of Culture – the censorship arm of the German Democratic Republic – objected to certain formulations in the third lecture and made the publication of the lectures as a whole contingent upon commensurate changes. Christa Wolf was not willing to accommodate; she insisted that the omissions be at least made visible. The relevant segments were struck by the publisher and marked by a symbol of omission - [...]. The third lecture is followed by the annotation “(abbreviated version).” Within the history of East German censorship, this was a formidable event that can be gleaned from Christa Wolf’s collected works. However, the only way to interpret these symbols as censorship is through familiarity with the background of the text and the various east and west editions. Since the third lecture consists of diary entries, they could easily be interpreted as omissions by the author herself.

Beyond these textual distinctions, however, both editions reveal variances in the layout and not least in the composition of the texts. While the lectures and the narrative appeared in two separate books in the Federal Republic and certainly therefore were generally perceived as such in their reception as well, the Aufbau edition published them collected in one volume that included numerous black and white photographs as well. Christa Wolf’s son-in-law, Martin Hoffmann, was responsible for the image editing as well as the one-volume layout – as he had been for her earlier and later books. Most of the photographs are private property of Christa and Gerhard Wolf.

Of particular interest to me in this example is the fact that handwritten copies of the deleted passages were circulating in the German Democratic Republic very shortly after the publication of the Aufbau edition. Many private copies of the censored January 1984 and later Aufbau edition contain inserted handwritten pages that restored the missing sentences to the published text.

The *Cassandra* text is altered accordingly, because the inserted pages are not necessarily identical with Christa Wolf’s manuscript or the Luchterhand edition. The pages in the copy I have are written in blue ink on light blue paper and are numbered with the respective page number. In spite of the obvious care taken with the copy, corrections had still been made and other mistakes went unnoticed or also uncorrected. Since these pages were produced by an anonymous reader, one can only speculate about the circumstances under which the copy took

place – if discovered, the copy probably would have been seized and punished – and what the actual source of copy was.³

For Christa Wolf's 60th birthday, the first complete East German edition was published by Aufbau in March 1989. This complete edition deviates from earlier Aufbau editions in the number of pages (350 pages – 364 pages); the shortened edition and the complete edition are hardly distinguishable at first glance: both the cover design and the colophon page indicate that this is one and the same text.

This example makes it clear how problematic an abstract notion of text can be even in application to almost solely written material. In contrast, if one speaks of the document complex Cassandra that consists of a variety of documents, it is possible to take the differences in media as well as the various textual versions into consideration. By asking which means of production Christa Wolf as well as others used, such as typograph, one-band volumes, etc., one can then investigate not only the relationship between content and form but also the effects of the various media.

Using the *docem* term makes it additionally possible to analyze more closely the discrete parts of the documents within the complex of documents. If we view the loose leaves added to the already bound book as *docems* without which the document would be incomplete, we are taking the relationship between print text and manuscript and between author and reader into consideration, as well as the perhaps “official” producers. Since we are talking about loose pages, one can imagine that at least a few individual pages were damaged over the course of time or even lost entirely. It's not certain whether the owner of the book had access to several copies or not. At the same time, the loose leaves must have had advantages for the reader: they could be inserted into the book at the right spots and then maybe taken back out again and stored separately. Since a fountain pen was used to make the copy, the reader's individuality is expressed through handwriting.

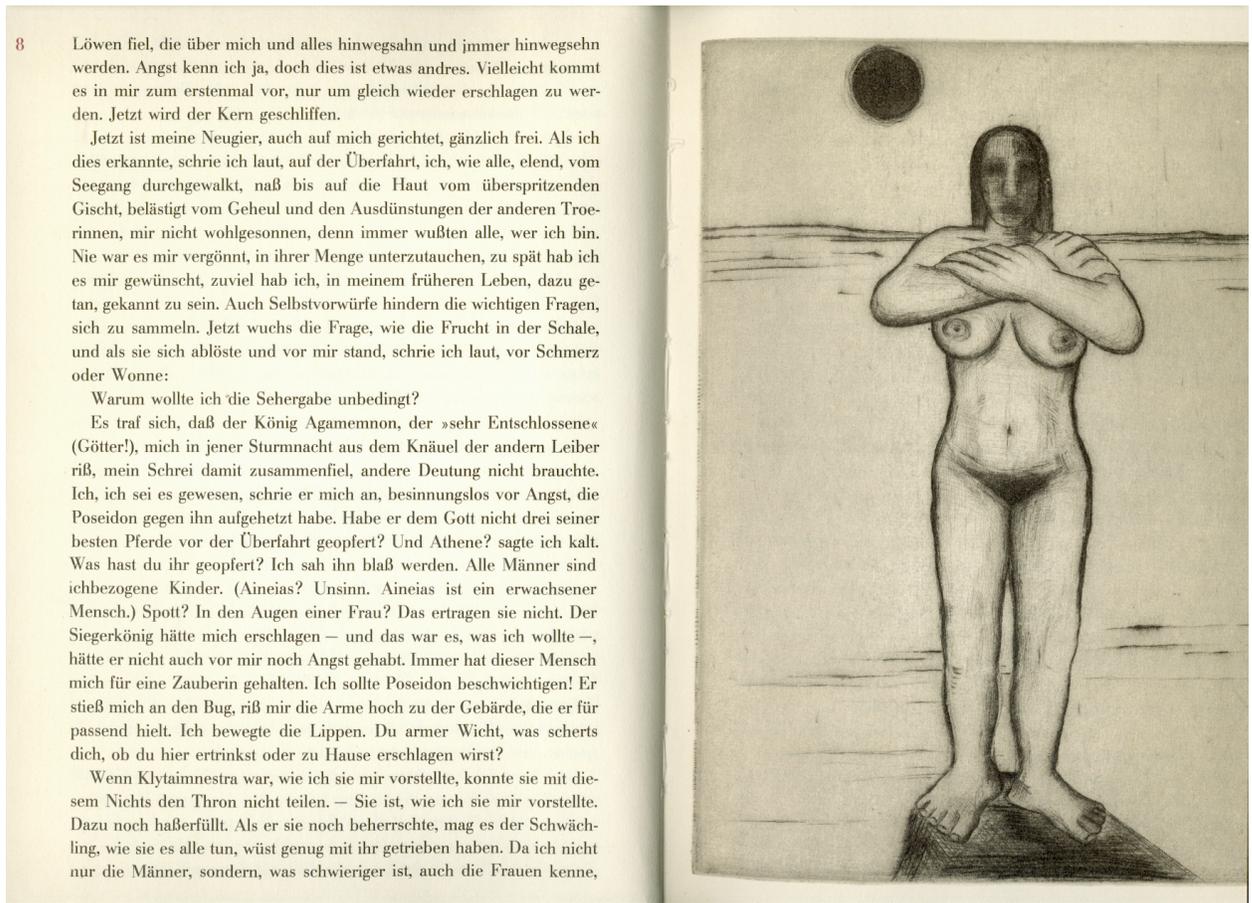
In the historical context it is nearly impossible to make more precise statements on the frequency of these “text completions.” Nonetheless, we know that Christa Wolf's texts went into many reprint and that the censorship heightened interest in the text and the “non-text.” Since

³ In regard to literature published under undemocratic conditions, the example used here is hardly unique. Cf. for example Mikhael Bulgakov's *Master and Margarita* in Samizdat: 2000, 283.

⁴ Of the West German edition alone, 90,000 copies of the lectures and 150,000 copies of the narrative had sold by 1985.

Christa Wolf's texts commanded a virtual cult following and the censored passages were treated like treasures, one can assume that there probably are quite a few copies of *Cassandra* of completed by hand that differ from each other because of this docem. Since these unbound pages can vary highly in appearance and can be inserted and removed again, they are reminiscent more of less stabile document types than a printed book.

Illustrations



spüre, daß es mir nichts ausmacht, wie dieses oder ein anderes Zimmer aussieht.

Als der Kuchen aus dem Ofen kommt, schiebt G. den großen in Folie gewickelten Fisch hinein, ein paar eingewickelte Kartoffeln dazu. Das braucht jetzt dreiviertel Stunden. Inzwischen decken wir den Tisch – es wird warm in der Küche –, G. macht einen Krabbencocktail, holt guten kalten Weißwein, wir fangen langsam an zu essen. Es schmeckt, wir werden lustig. Endlich sind Fisch und Kartoffeln gar: Ein oft sich wiederholender Vorgang, wie G. beides aus dem Herd holt, es auswickelt, prüfend hineinsticht, die Portionen austeilt. Dieser Tag ist für mich voller Vorgänge, die sich wiederholen, der gute Alltag. Ich frage mich, ob es „nötig“ ist, noch weitere hundert oder tausend Wiederholungen dieser gleichen Vorgänge zu erleben. Die Impulse zum Weiterleben müssen von etwas Neuem kommen, auf das wir hinzielen, sonst könnte es passieren, daß wir uns hinter unserm Rücken mit einem Urteil abfinden.

Wir wechseln zu einem neuen Wein über. Die Rede kommt auf die Weltlage: Der Krieg zwischen Irak und Iran, der, wie das meiste heute, Irrsinnszüge hat. (Inwiefern eigentlich? Wieso sind nicht alle Kriege, einschließlich des troianischen, Irrsinn? Weil sein Ziel „realitätsgerecht“ war: die Achaier brauchten den Zugang zum Bosphorus, was heißt, sie mußten den Troern die Kontrolle zu diesem Zugang, zu den Dardanellen, abringen? Von welcher Verluste an verlieren Kriege die „realitätsgerechten“ Züge?)

Die Menschen beobachtend, wie sie ihren Alltag absolvieren, fragen wir uns – wir vier um den hellen Küchentisch, nach einem guten Essen, beim Wein: Worauf hoffen sie (oder wir)? Hoffen sie überhaupt? Was erhoffen sie für ihre Kinder? Ist der Impetus aufgebraucht, der seit einigen Generationen für die Kinder immer „etwas Besseres“ erhofft hatte als für einen selbst? [...]

R. weiß Zahlen aus der letzten Erhebung der UNO über den Stand der Rüstungen auf der Welt. Danach kämen nun wohl auf jeden Erdbewohner, also auf jeden von uns,

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drei Tonnen TNT. Die Großmächte könnten sich gegenseitig mehr als ein Dutzend Mal vernichten. Undsowweiter. Wir lachen, ein wenig verlegen. Das „normale Gefühl“ bleibt taub gegenüber solchen Zahlen. Empörung, Aufbegehren wären unangemessen. Die Ästhetik des Widerstandes *dagegen* wäre erst noch zu entwickeln.

Wem kann ich erzählen, daß die „Ilias“ mich langweilt?

Meteln, 7. Dezember 1980

Traum: Wir leben auf einem Bauerngehöft, kleiner, schmutziger, elender als dieses hier, in dem ich erwache. Stehn auf dem Hof. Von dort aus gibt es einen netzartig überdachten Einschluß für Tiere in die Küche, da sehn wir ein wildes Tier – ein Puma! sagen wir erschrocken – hineinschlüpfen. Entsetzt laufen wir hinein, die kleine, verräucherte, schmutzige und armselige Küche ist durch ein Drahtgitter abgeteilt, hinter dem ich Geflügel, Haustiere undeutlich wahrnehme, und nun eben auch diesen „Puma“, dahinter aber noch ein zweites wildes Tier, von merkwürdiger, furchteinflößender und ekelregender Gestalt, für das es gleich gar keinen Namen gibt. Eine entsetzliche Niedergeschlagenheit. Die Tiere müssen weg! sage ich zu H. Wir gehn alle essen, sitzen bedrückt um einen runden Tisch – da ruft H. mich in die Küche. Das zweite der wilden Tiere hinter dem Drahtzaun ist angeschossen, es blutet aus einer Wunde an der Schulter, blickt uns vorwurfsvoll, traurig und zugleich unveröhnlich an. Hast du auf es geschossen? frage ich H. – Natürlich, sagt er, was sollte man denn machen. – Er hat ein Jagdgewehr genommen, das in der Küche an der Wand hing. Noch einmal könne er aber nicht schießen. Das Tier sieht nicht so aus, als wolle es an dieser Wunde verenden. Uns fällt ein, die Tiere könnten einem vorüberziehenden Zirkus entlaufen sein. Nun kann man da auch nicht mehr nachfragen. Mit ihnen leben können wir auf gar keinen Fall. Sie umbringen auch nicht. Freiwillig verlassen die unsere Küche nicht. Wir stehn da, Auge in Auge mit den stummen

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(S. 110)

„Die Oberkommandos des NATO und des Warschauer Paktes beraten über neue Rüstungsaustellungen, um der augenommenen waffentechnischen Überlegenheit des jeweiligen Gegners etwas Gleichwertiges entgegenzusetzen.“

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